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Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2008

County leaders pack their bags for Denver convention

Council members, executive representing Montgomery next week

by Janel Davis | Staff Writer

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Less than a week before the Democratic National Convention county officials are packing up to take the trip to Denver as part of the state's contingent of party leaders participating in the four-day political congregation Aug. 25-28.

County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) is on his way, looking forward to a re-united party.

"One of the things that I'm looking for is hopefully we have a sense of unity, and to build on that because that's a key element to any convention that the party is unified," Leggett said. "With the issues we've had in the past, the seating of delegates and other things, I think we've had a very divisive primary fight which could potentially divide parties. We're looking to resolve those challenges."

Leggett, a former Maryland Democratic Party chairman, is looking forward to Aug. 28 when Illinois Sen. Barack Obama accepts the nomination inside INVESCO Field at Mile High.

"That is historic and we should not take that for granted," Leggett said. "But in addition to the historic nature is how well we are prepared at the national level to govern and that may spur national interest but that alone is not going to win an election. ... It is certainly historic, I am extremely pleased that the party nominated Barack Obama, but we win based on the ideas and leadership represented at that level."

Just a few weeks ago, Leggett was planning on giving the convention a pass. He changed his mind because he could make plans for campaigning for Obama as the election nears.

On the County Council, Nancy Floreen, Valerie Ervin and Duchy Trachtenberg are making the trip to the Mile High City. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park and Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring are taking the scenic route: a cross-country drive, at their own expense, through historical cities of the South, then on to New Mexico and up to Colorado.

The car compatriots left on their trip Saturday. Reached on the road Monday morning, the councilwomen were 60 miles outside of Little Rock, Ark., on their way to historic Central High School, the first school to be integrated after the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1957.

"I'm going [to the convention] to make history. It's a very exciting opportunity to be part of an incredible nomination process with a whole new take on the presidency," Floreen said. "It's my first time so I have no idea what to expect."

Floreen — an elected Hillary Clinton delegate — will join the group of Maryland lawmakers and political party leaders also designated as delegates, in meetings and discussions at the Pepsi Center throughout the week leading up to Obama's acceptance speech.

The Denver convention is also the first for Ervin.



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happens. For me and for my children and grandchildren, it's something I'll be able to talk about with them."

Of local importance to Ervin are the conversations about public education, child care and health care, issues that are significant to her constituents, women and minorities, she said.

Trachtenberg, a convention veteran, is making the trip as a county representative as well as a major player in the feminist movement.

A former regional director of the National Organization for Women, Trachtenberg (D-At large) of North Bethesda has worked on issues on the party's platform specific to women's rights, including pay equity, women in poverty and access to reproductive services.

"I will be there when [Hillary Clinton's] name is placed into the nomination [on the ballot]. For me and other feminists, that is really a phenomenal event," Trachtenberg said. "That's history that we'll be witnessing."

A few fun facts on the Democratic National Convention in Denver:

50,000 conventioners

15,000 media representatives

21,000 convention volunteers

17,000 hotel rooms booked for convention week

503 California delegates, the largest delegation

130 countries represented by journalists covering the convention

85 degrees: average high temperature in Denver in August; 35 percent: average humidity

43 miles of cable laid by DNC to run its operations

Baltimore hosted first DNC in 1832, nominated Andrew Jackson for president

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